

Message

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Subject: USS Lead - Press

http://www.greenfieldreporter.com/2017/05/11/leaders_must_reverse_environmental_decline/

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Leaders must reverse environmental decline

By [Staff Reports](#) -

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Indiana has many reputations. Residents are known for “Hoosier hospitality.” State politicians boast about the “business-friendly” economic climate, fiscal prudence and a budget surplus. It’s home to the Indy 500, the Pacers, Colts and “Hoosier Hysteria.”

The state also is renowned for its unhealthy environment. This weekend’s Earth Day observance illuminates the problem. It also creates an opportunity for Gov. Eric Holcomb to make safe water, clean air and well-maintained state parks a priority, reversing years of disinterest by the Statehouse leadership. Indiana needs Holcomb to become its “environmentalist governor.”

The lack of concern for Hoosier lands, streams and public spaces shows. Air quality here ranked 47th, just three spots from being America’s worst, in the 2017 Greenest States ratings released by WalletHub last week. Overall, Indiana ranked 39th in environmental quality.

The state agency charged with monitoring air and water safety, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, has seen its staffing sliced from 950 in 2008 to just 800 now, according to a Hoosier Environmental Council report. The Great Recession triggered the initial cuts, but the shrinkage continued under previous governors Mitch Daniels and Mike Pence. Funding and staffing combined are 17 percent smaller than a decade ago.

That matters to people in East Chicago, where high levels of lead and arsenic in soil and drinking water forced residents to move elsewhere and an elementary school to close temporarily. As one resident told the Chicago Sun-Times, “We can’t drink the water. The land we walk upon is contaminated. And the air we breathe is contaminated.”

Admirably, Holcomb quickly declared a state of emergency in East Chicago shortly after he took office this year, a step Pence declined.

Areas beyond East Chicago are affected, too. The Muncie Star Press cited IDEM’s conclusion last year that 60 percent of the state’s waterways are unfit for people and animals, and a 2014 warning by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce about the need for better management of water supplies available to residents and businesses.

Holcomb also inherits a state parks system that is a recreational gem yet in dire need of investment in repairs, upkeep and adequate staffing. The Environmental Council report issued recently said, “The decline in [Department of Natural Resources] funding is very noticeable in the state of disrepair seen in DNR facilities around Indiana — state parks buildings, trails, and water and sewer infrastructure.” Historic parks, amenities built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930s, “are at risk of deteriorating past the point of saving them,” the council added.

The Trump administration began reversing Obama-era federal regulations, a move cheered by Indiana officials, including Holcomb. Trump also has proposed a massive, 31 percent cut to the EPA. So Indiana’s neglected and polluted assets won’t be getting any extra care from the feds.

Indiana needs Holcomb to stand in that environmental gap and begin lifting up the quality of the Hoosier state’s natural resources.

This was distributed by Hoosier State Press Association. Send comments to dr-editorial@greenfieldreporter.com.

Sincerely,

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